

**States of  
Illinois**

**Indiana**

**Iowa**

**Michigan**

**Minnesota**

**Missouri**

**Ohio**

**Wisconsin**

**City of  
Chicago**

April 10, 2009

The Honorable Ray LaHood  
Secretary, United States Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Secretary LaHood:

We write to you today to express our support and consensus for the passenger rail projects in our states. Our states encompass three key corridors of the Midwest Regional Rail System – Chicago-Milwaukee-Madison-Twin Cities, Chicago-St. Louis, and Chicago-Detroit-Pontiac – as well as other corridors that connect Midwest population centers. As you complete your strategic plan to improve and deploy high-speed passenger rail systems in the United States, as mandated in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), we are pleased to share with you the unique qualities of our regional initiative and the reasons we believe projects in these corridors should be given top priority for high-speed passenger rail funding.<sup>1</sup>

The Midwest Regional Rail Initiative (MWRRI) was first conceived by nine states<sup>2</sup> in the mid-1990s. Our states, in consultation with Amtrak and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), have worked to develop a vision for a 21<sup>st</sup> century passenger rail network. The system was predicated on three key approaches – 110-mile-per-hour service; significantly increased frequencies; and next generation trains that will bring a faster, more reliable, more service-focused mobility option to travelers. Our first plan was released in 1998. It was comprehensively updated in 2004, and implementation planning continues by the nine states to the present day.

The major elements of our nine-state passenger rail initiative include:

- *3,000 miles of existing rights of way to connect rural, small urban and major metropolitan areas.* The states will work with freight railroads to assess where capacity is needed to provide reliable 110-mile-per-hour service.
- *Operation of a hub-and-spoke passenger rail system that provides service to and through Chicago to locations across the Midwest.* All corridors provide service to city-to-city pairs within 500 miles of each other.
- *Modern train equipment that operates initially at 110 miles per hour.* Current passenger rail equipment is outdated and designed for a 20<sup>th</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> High-speed rail is defined in P.L. 110-432 as intercity passenger rail service that is reasonably expected to reach speeds of at least 110 miles per hour.

<sup>2</sup> Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio and Wisconsin.

century train network, not a 21<sup>st</sup> century network. Next generation train equipment will travel at faster speeds with better acceleration and deceleration, will provide increased comfort and amenities for riders, and will provide travelers with more options than air or auto modes.

- *Multi-modal connections that will improve the entire transportation system network.* The states engaged in the MWRRRI understand the importance of intermodalism. The passenger rail network and feeder system will connect riders to their communities, airports, bus stations and highways.
- *Focus on reliability and on-time performance.* We know that ridership depends on trains that arrive and depart on time. We are familiar with the predictable by-the-minute train service that exists in Europe and Asia. The MWRRRI Plan recommends track and signal improvements to achieve the same level of on-time performance. That is the MWRRRI vision.

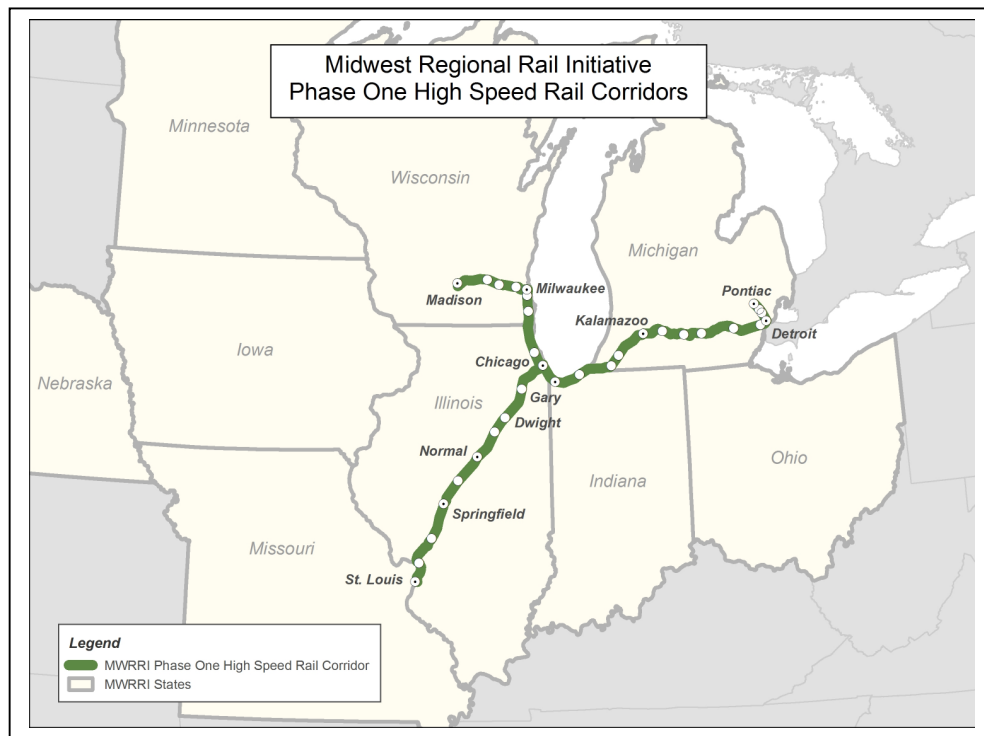
The 2004 Midwest Regional Rail Initiative Executive Report recommends that corridor segments with the highest potential ridership per dollar invested be implemented first. All of these corridors have Chicago as the hub, and in order to provide dependable high-speed rail service, we need to address rail congestion in Chicago. Further, Chicago is also the freight rail hub and as a result, investment in passenger rail in Chicago is also going to positively impact freight rail traffic for the region and the country.

These “Phase I” corridors are Chicago-Milwaukee-Madison; Chicago-St. Louis; and Chicago-Detroit-Pontiac. We ask that you recognize the merits of the three corridors by awarding funding to key projects. Much work has already been done to move these corridor projects closer to implementation. This work and the proposed next steps follow:

- Wisconsin has completed preliminary engineering and an environmental assessment for 110-mile-per-hour operations in the Milwaukee to Madison Corridor and has received a “finding of no significant impact” from the FRA. Funding will be sought for track, signal and other infrastructure upgrades, as well as new train equipment.
- Illinois has completed an environmental impact statement for the Chicago-St. Louis Corridor and has received a “record of decision” for the portion of the corridor from Dwight to St. Louis. In addition, the State has already invested \$143 million in the corridor. Funding will be sought for track, signal and other upgrades in the segment, as well as new equipment for the Chicago-St. Louis trains.
- Michigan and Amtrak, working with the FRA, have implemented an “incremental train control system,” currently allowing 95-mile-per-hour operations for portions of the corridor between Chicago and Detroit. The final audit report, which is nearing completion, and a request for increased train speeds up to 110 miles per hour is expected to be submitted to FRA within the next few months. Funding will be sought for track, signal and other infrastructure upgrades.

- Currently, freight and passenger trains are delayed by rail congestion in the Chicago hub terminal. Improvements in the Chicago hub are needed to achieve the goals of the MWRRI, including separation of passenger and freight movements to eliminate conflicts. Funding will be sought for infrastructure upgrades through a partnership of the State of Illinois, the City of Chicago, and the railroads serving Chicago.

With ARRA funds, projects in these Phase I corridors can be completed between 2012 and 2014. Our preliminary engineering estimates indicate these projects will require approximately \$3.4 billion<sup>3</sup> for track and operating equipment pending final design and equipment specifications. Phase I MWRRI projects have been studied for over a decade; they were developed by a group of states committed to providing mobility options to our citizens. With Chicago as the backbone, the Midwest regional rail network will promote our regional and national economic development goals.



It is a top priority for the MWRRI that funding be awarded for additional Phase II projects in 2009 so the construction can begin as Phase I projects are completed. The funding needed for Phase II planning, environmental and design work is estimated to cost approximately \$130 million. In addition to the Phase II work, our top priority includes funding for design and consideration of ready-to-go segments of the MWRRI.

The Region will request funding for the preliminary engineering and design associated with Phase II high-speed rail projects that the states wish to construct upon completion of the Phase I projects. The MWRRI states have outlined a number of Phase II projects, including completion of corridors that extend from Chicago to the Twin Cities, Indianapolis, Toledo, Cleveland, Cincinnati and

<sup>3</sup> 2009 dollars.

Pontiac, Michigan. In addition, further engineering and environmental work must be completed on routing alternatives between Dwight and Chicago in the Chicago-St. Louis Corridor. Beyond these Phase II projects, the MWRRI states will also develop the remaining projects in the system plan, including: Chicago to Grand Rapids/Holland, Port Huron, Carbondale, Quincy, Quad Cities-Iowa City-Des Moines-Omaha and Green Bay; and St. Louis to Kansas City.

Ohio is developing its passenger rail service for its 260-mile Cleveland-Columbus-Cincinnati "3C" Corridor, which will reach 60 percent of Ohio's population and is the most populated Chicago hub network corridor without rail service. Ohio is currently working on this project in partnership with freight railroads and Amtrak.

Some Phase II projects are ready to go – for example, the St. Paul Union Depot project, which is being renovated to serve as a hub for Amtrak, inter- and intra-city bus and passenger rail. In late 2009, the Northstar Commuter Rail Line, Hiawatha LRT and intra-city bus will all converge adjacent to the new Minnesota Twins stadium in Minneapolis. Minnesota has also established a Passenger Rail Forum of key stakeholders to develop data-driven, collaborative decisions on further rail development. The forum will play a key role in completion and implementation of a Minnesota Passenger and Freight Rail Plan. These efforts offer a strong local foundation for Minnesota's connection to the MWRRI.

Since the President has outlined his high-speed rail vision for the nation, the states see a long-term policy and funding partner in the federal government for building the nation's high-speed passenger rail network. To that end, the states in our nine-state region will work to develop and update our own state rail plans. These updates will address the federal government's recognition that high-speed intercity passenger rail should be an integral part of the nation's transportation network. In addition, the states must work with their freight railroad partners on capacity issues. Communities that have not been part of the MWRRI planning effort – Duluth, Minnesota; Dubuque, Iowa; Eau Claire, Wisconsin; Rockford, Illinois; Rochester, Minnesota – to name a few, will now receive consideration in light of the President's vision and a federal funding source.

President Obama's vision of making high-speed rail a part of our nation's future transportation network holds great promise. We recognize that a high-speed rail network has the potential to reduce highway and airway congestion, greenhouse gas emissions, and the nation's dependence on foreign oil. We are encouraged by the \$8 billion down payment on this initiative made in ARRA, and we share President Obama's desire that real economic progress be made through infrastructure investment.

The year 2016 could be a landmark year in Chicago history if Chicago is successful in its bid to host the 2016 Olympics. Your approval of funding to construct the MWRRI projects, with a plan to complete them in time for the Olympics, could help Chicago in its bid to host the Olympic games.

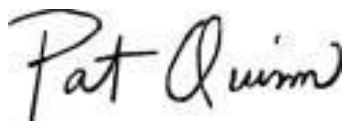
President Obama has summoned the courage to create a vision for the rebirth of intercity passenger rail. Should the MWRRI be given top priority for ARRA funds, the states will work to complete projects by the end of the stimulus and will reintroduce the nation as a builder of big vision transportation projects. We

believe there is great potential in the Phase I and Phase II MWRRI projects and are committed to this partnership.

We understand that the demand for ARRA high-speed passenger rail funds will be great. We urge your support for funding of the Phase I, Phase II, and other ready-to-go MWRRI projects and ask for your careful consideration of the years of hard work that have allowed our states to be ready for this moment. Our regional plan supports a network vision and a national strategy

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to the possibility of the Chicago Olympic Games in 2016, and we commit our time and efforts to assuring that we are ready.

Sincerely,



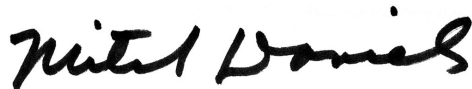
---

Pat Quinn, Governor  
State of Illinois



---

Jay Nixon, Governor  
State of Missouri



---

Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr., Governor  
State of Indiana



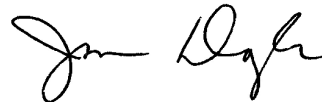
---

Ted Strickland, Governor  
State of Ohio



---

Chester J. Culver, Governor  
State of Iowa



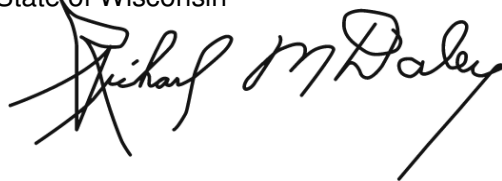
---

Jim Doyle, Governor  
State of Wisconsin



---

Jennifer M. Granholm, Governor  
State of Michigan



---

Richard M. Daley, Mayor  
City of Chicago



---

Tim Pawlenty, Governor  
State of Minnesota